



Leadership Styles

Where do you fit in the mix?

Four of the most basic leadership styles are:

- Autocratic
- Bureaucratic
- Laissez-faire
- Democratic

Autocratic Leadership Style

This is often considered the classical approach. It is one in which the manager retains as much power and decision-making authority as possible. The manager does not consult [employees](#), nor are they allowed to give any input. Employees are expected to obey orders without receiving any explanations. The motivation environment is produced by creating a structured set of rewards and punishments.

This [leadership style](#) has been greatly criticized during the past 30 years. Some studies say that organizations with many autocratic leaders have higher turnover and absenteeism than other organizations. Certainly Gen X employees have proven to be highly resistant to this management style. These studies say that autocratic leaders:

- Rely on threats and punishment to influence employees
- Do not trust employees
- Do not allow for employee input

Bureaucratic Leadership Style

Bureaucratic leadership is where the manager manages “by the book” Everything must be done according to procedure or policy. If it isn’t covered by the book, the manager refers to the next level above him or her. This manager is really more of a police officer than a leader. He or she enforces the rules.

This style can be effective when:

- Employees are performing routine tasks over and over.
- Employees need to understand certain standards or procedures.
- Employees are working with dangerous or delicate equipment that requires a definite set of procedures to operate.
- Safety or [security training](#) is being conducted.
- Employees are performing tasks that require handling cash.

Democratic Leadership Style

The democratic leadership style is also called the participative style as it encourages employees to be a part of the decision making. The democratic manager keeps his or her employees informed about everything that affects their work and shares decision making and problem solving responsibilities. This style requires the leader to be a coach who has the final say, but gathers information from staff members before making a decision.

Democratic leadership can produce high quality and high quantity work for long periods of time. Many employees like the trust they receive and respond with cooperation, team spirit, and high morale. Typically the democratic leader:

- Develops plans to help employees evaluate their own performance

- Allows employees to establish goals
- Encourages employees to grow on the job and be promoted
- Recognizes and encourages achievement.

Laissez-Faire Leadership Style

The laissez-faire leadership style is also known as the “hands-off” style. It is one in which the manager provides little or no direction and gives employees as much freedom as possible. All authority or power is given to the employees and they must determine goals, make decisions, and resolve problems on their own.

This is an effective style to use when:

- Employees are highly skilled, experienced, and educated.
- Employees have pride in their work and the drive to do it successfully on their own.
- Outside experts, such as staff specialists or consultants are being used
- Employees are trustworthy and experienced.

Varying Leadership Style

While the proper leadership style depends on the situation, there are three other factors that also influence which leadership style to use.

1. The manager’s personal background. What personality, knowledge, values, ethics, and experiences does the manager have. What does he or she think will work?
2. The employees being supervised. Employees are individuals with different personalities and backgrounds. The leadership style managers use will vary depending upon the individual employee and what he or she will respond best to.
3. The company. The traditions, values, philosophy, and concerns of the company will influence how a manager acts.

